

STATEMENT OF BERNARD HOPKINS BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION

Senator McCain, members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you on an issue of vital importance to me and the over one thousand other men and women who put their lives on the line on a daily basis for others' entertainment. I am currently preparing to participate in my sixteenth title defense, however I have broken camp to be here because I take this proposed legislation seriously and I want to do all that I can to help make legitimate boxing reform a reality.

For as far long as anyone can remember, gladiators have met in arenas throughout the world to engage in battle for sport. Throughout those years two things have remained constant: The gladiators have given their all to the sport and some of those gladiators have been exploited by a small group of shameless individuals who have profited at the gladiators' expense. While most promoters, managers and agents are decent human beings who clearly have the best interest of the boxers in mind, there are a small minority who seek only personal gain at any cost. Your legislation recognizes this and it attempts to level the playing field. I applaud you for your efforts. I believe that S. 2550 will help my brother and sister boxers and me to maintain our health, financial well being and dignity.

As you know, I am the undisputed middleweight champ of the world. With that comes fame, money and notoriety. I am at the top of the game so to speak. I fight in huge arenas before thousands of people. My fights have been aired on HBO, Showtime and other networks so that millions more can watch. I am trained for those fights by the

best trainers in the business and every part of my existence in those months leading up to a fight are controlled and regulated down to the most minute detail. It may sound great, but it is not. Not for me and less so for the vast majority of professional boxers who pound away at each other in cold, damp venues, before crowds of people who pay to see blood and knockouts. We are often crippled and sometimes killed during these events and in all cases are not fairly compensated for what we do. I am paid Millions while most are paid hundreds to risk our lives. Some do it because we love the sport. Most of us chose this profession because it was the only way for us to rise up from our impoverished backgrounds and get a small piece of the American Dream. We don't ask for your sympathy or pity, we just ask to be treated fairly. We seek a fair wage for our labor and to work in as safe an environment as possible. You and your predecessors have helped create the minimum wage, OSHA and other laws that help American workers, its time that you give us the same protection.

While I am thankful for all that the fans have given me, I can not keep quiet when I see that things are not right. My stature has given me the opportunity to buck the system. I have been an outspoken advocate for change. I have rejected multi-million dollar paydays because the terms of the agreements presented to me were not fair. I have this luxury because I have food in my refrigerator and money invested in mutual funds. Other boxers cannot do this. They often are forced to borrow money to feed their families between bouts. It is for them that I have come to testify and hopefully you will keep them in mind when you go back to your offices to consider this legislation. The Muhammad Ali act was a great START. It attempted to do away with many of those shady backdoor deals between promoters and managers that forever doomed fighters to

lives of indentured servitude. We were locked into long term, lopsided contracts that ensured only that we would have to fight until we were physically no longer able to do so. Our retirements were spent working as security guards, chauffeurs, or greeters at hotel/casinos. While the Act addressed some of those ills, it was not enough. It had no teeth and no practical impact on the average professional boxer. Promoters violated it with impunity because they knew that for the most part there would be no negative consequences.

Though I do not have the statistics to support it, I believe that the average professional boxer lives at or below the poverty line. Only a handful of boxers receive over Twenty Thousand Dollars per year in purses. They live to fight and fight to live. They fight at the promoters' whims and therefore do not have the luxury to reject purse amounts, and exclusive promoter/manager agreements, when the agreements violate the Act. Likewise, they do not have the resources and information necessary to prosecute claims against promoters and managers for violations of the Act.

Creation of the USBA will help. It will provide the uniformity and fairness that boxing so desperately needs. The sanctioning organizations need to be forced to come up with clear, logical and fair ways to rank boxers. I need to know the extent of the relationship between the sanctioning organizations and the promoters of the other top ranked middleweights. Safety standards should be uniform. I need to know that the commissioner in Nevada is just as concerned about the health and well being of my opponent and me as the commissioner in New York. Sanctioning organizations should not have a role in assigning judges or referees to fights.

Despite your good intentions, however, I must add that we still need more. There should be mandatory arbitration provisions placed in every promotional agreement which afford boxers a fast and less costly means by which to challenge provisions of the contracts. The U.S. Attorney General and the chief law enforcers in every state should all commit themselves to enforcing this Act. There should also be a provision which would allow for private causes of action for violations of the Act and promoters and managers should be liable for treble damages and attorney fees if they violate provisions of the act. When the promoters renew their license every two years consideration should be given to whether they have violated this act. The USBA should do whatever is necessary to make boxers, promoters and managers aware of its rules. This legislation does no one any good if its provisions are kept secret.

Thank you so much for caring enough to draft this legislation. I hope that you consider these comments when considering the final provisions of this Act. I thank you for allowing me to testify.